

## California State Parks The Best of California, Forever

### Please Remember



Many visitors in a fragile area means that the understanding and cooperation of all are needed to preserve the qualities that make Portola such a special place.

• **DOGS** Your dog may come to the park with you, but it must be on a short leash (6 feet max.) during the day, and enclosed in a tent or vehicle at night. Dogs are allowed in campsites, picnic areas, paved roads, and Upper and Lower Escape Roads only. To protect park wildlife, dogs are not permitted on hiking trails. County parks do not allow dogs at all.

• **BICYCLES** All single-track trails at Portola are closed to bikes and horses. Look in this guide for The Old Haul Road Trail, which offers a 12-mile round-trip ride through the redwoods. Bicycles are not allowed on hiking trails at Portola.

• **FIREWOOD** All park features are protected, even twigs and branches on the ground. They slowly decay and form natural mulch for the forest. Firewood gathering disturbs this recycling process. Firewood is available for sale at the office if you do not bring firewood with you.

• **FIRES** Redwoods have shallow root systems, susceptible to injuries such as scorch from campfires built on the ground. Please use the fireplace provided, or your own approved camp stove. Fires must be kept safe (no high flames or sparks) and must not be left unattended.

Plants and wildlife are protected in the Park. Flowers will make seeds for next year's flowers. Mushrooms and berries are needed as a food supply for wildlife. If left alone, smaller twigs and leaves will decompose to form a rich organic mulch to nourish the many different plants in the forest. Please leave banana slugs where you find them so they can find their homes during the heat of the day. Insects, crayfish, snakes, all Park wildlife need your help: leave them alone, and let them carry out their important functions in the life of the forest. Thanks.

• **PEACE AND QUIET** Quiet time is 10 p.m. to 6 a.m. daily. Sound from electronic equipment including radios, speakers and other devices should not be heard beyond your own area. Generators should not be operated between 8 p.m. and 10 a.m.

• **HAMMOCKS** If your hammock will damage a tree, including the bark, it is illegal. When you tie your hammock, watch carefully: Is the tree big enough? Is the diameter of the tree at least 12" (38" circumference)? If the tree bends because of your hammock, find a larger tree, or do not use the hammock.

• **FISHING** Until more is known about the silver salmon population in Pescadero Creek and its tributaries, Portola streams will remain closed to fishing, including the taking of crayfish. Long-term studies are underway to learn more about native species. In January of 1982 an entire generation of young fish was lost to mud damage, and all local streams were closed by the Department of Fish and Game. The drought of the late '80s and early '90s kept the winter spawning runs to a minimum. Talk with Portola staff for updated information.

• **GAMES** No areas are provided for recreational games at Portola because of the long-term impact on our fragile redwood forest, and because of safety considerations. Ball games, horseshoes, badminton, and similar activities are prohibited in most State Parks.



IVERSON CABIN

Gene Chelmsworth sketch

## Portola History

In 1769 noted Spanish explorer Don Gaspar de Portola led an expedition through present day San Mateo County in search of Monterey Bay. He happened upon a new anchorage, the bay which was later named San Francisco! California's Gold Rush of 1849 began a demand for ever-increasing amounts of timber for mining and construction; lumbermen became the original settlers of the Santa Cruz Mountains, cutting what seemed to be unending groves of thousand-year-old redwoods. The first local settler of record is Christian Iverson, a Scandinavian immigrant who had worked as a Pony Express rider and shotgun guard. He acquired two parcels of land on Pescadero Creek in the 1860s, building a cabin of hand-split redwood (which later property owners also used.) The cabin stood until the earthquake of October 1989. John A. Hooper, San Francisco businessman, built a two-story "summer home" on Pescadero Creek at the turn of the 20th century. By 1924 the Islam Temple Shrine of San Francisco had purchased approximately 1600 acres to be used as a summer retreat for members. In 1945 the State of California purchased the parcel for use as a State Park. Generous donations from the Save-the-Redwoods League have increased the total area of Portola State Park to over 2,800 acres today.

## Acknowledgements

This Portola State Park brochure is the product of many talented individuals and generous associations. The California Department of Parks and Recreation wishes to thank:



**HealthNet** - for a special grant to help meet expenses of production.



**Save-the-Redwoods League** - working since 1918 to preserve and protect the great Sequoia and Coast Redwood forests for future generations. Through their efforts, over one thousand acres have been added to Portola State Park.



**Volunteers In Portola** - a non-profit organization established to benefit the park. Donations to VIP are tax deductible, and are used for displays and other interpretive needs. Volunteers are invited to help with projects in the park. Docent training is available. Contact the park if you or someone you know might be interested in becoming a VIP.



State of California • The Resources Agency  
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## Getting to the Park

In south San Mateo County, in the rugged terrain of a deep canyon between two ridges, Portola State Park offers 2,800 acres of solitude and relaxation just over the hill from the Bay Area. Whether visitors drive from San Jose (Hwy 9) or Palo Alto (Page Mill Road) or Redwood City (Hwy 84), the trip to Portola usually takes less than one hour. Use extreme care during the last few miles of the drive, where the road downhill is narrow and steep.

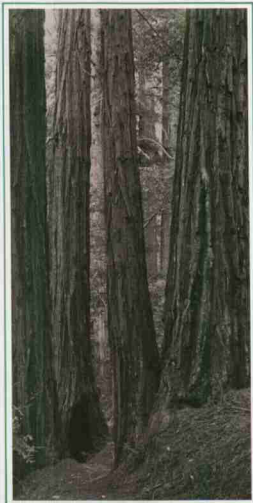
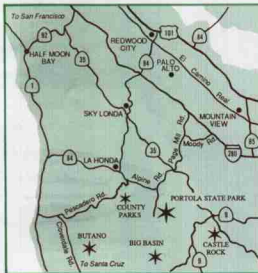


photo by Michelle Stone

**PORTOLA**  
State Park

## Sequoia Nature Trail Guide

The Sequoia Nature Trail is a 3/4-mile loop, intended to acquaint Portola visitors with the features of a redwood forest. Each paragraph below corresponds with a numbered post along the way. Allow 45 minutes.



1. Although the area within this fence appears static and calm, a closer look reveals a fascinating network of energy and life, below and above ground. As you walk, you can find that the health of a natural area depends on the subtle as well as the obvious. Because this guide only mentions a small portion of what you can find, please share your own ideas and questions with the Portola staff. The trail begins behind the Visitor Center.

2. An observant walker may have noticed at least five different kinds of trees and one common shrub already, each playing its own role in the forest community. This 125' Douglas fir shows signs of a difficult past; scars from insect damage, from fires and road construction, and the lean of the trunk all give evidence of outside forces affecting its past 200 years of life.

3. One of the most critical components of a healthy redwood forest is rich, spongy topsoil. Even the tallest redwood (300+ feet) may be rooted to a depth of only ten feet underground! In rainy weather, ponds of water form where these trailside posts are planted - a sign that even park visitors can compact the topsoil unknowingly. This compaction stops the soil building process, so our park staff periodically relocates the posts.

The shrubs around you are huckleberries. The edible berry is an important food source for wildlife in summer and fall. Please remember that all features of a State Park are protected - leave all berries for the wildlife to eat, and for other visitors to learn about.

4. The large redwood and fir trees on either side of the trail behind you are easy to tell apart; the Coast Redwood on the left has reddish, shaggy bark, showing evidence of one or more fires. Its foliage has a "herringbone" pattern, and its inch-long cones are almost round. The Douglas fir on the right has grey bark with deep fissures. The foliage is "bot-

tlebrush" looking, and the cones are 2-3 inches long, oblong in shape. Because of active fire suppression in California, and with the expansion of redwood logging, more aggressive species such as Douglas fir, tan oak, and huckleberry have become more common. In much of the forest a dense flammable understory has increased the danger of accidental fire.

5. Pescadero Creek flows all year, but the flow varies with the seasons. In winter the rushing water from Pescadero and Peters creeks can be heard from far away. In late summer the sound of water is barely audible from here. On a quiet day, sounds of woodpeckers, dippers and kingfishers might be heard as one gets closer to the creek. As you walk further down into the stream canyon, watch for changes in vegetation, and watch for evidence of winter's high water levels.

6. In past summers a large swimming/fishing area was created by a dam upstream. However, overuse problems occurred as visitation to Portola increased, especially during the drought of the mid-1970s. The dam was removed and the summer trout plantings were halted. Now, native steelhead and salmon can be seen returning from the Pacific when Fall rains begin. Look downstream for signs of high winter water levels where floating debris became entangled in streamside vegetation.

The layers of sandstone in the bank across the creek are the work of millions of years of ocean deposits, before the Santa Cruz Mountains were formed. Watch for ocean fossils in creekside rocks. California has spent more time on the bottom of the ocean than it has on dry land!

7. Like the red alder trees sending their roots into the streambank, the western azalea needs a constant water supply. In early summer, large white fragrant azalea flowers are an attraction. But beware! An observant person will find a small but hardy poison oak plant, hiding itself behind and to the right of the azalea. Poison oak leaves grow in patterns of three, on a smooth, tan stem. Leaves usually remain green until fall, when they turn to shades of red. In winter the stems are bare. Oil from the leaves, branches, flowers, berries, and roots can cause allergic reactions.

8. Tan oak trees surrounding this point are identified by their flat leaves with diagonal "parking space" veins, and by their acorns with fuzzy caps. The tanbark industry and redwood logging both flourished in this area during the last part of the 19th century. In the old tanning process, the bitter tannin was removed from oak bark, then used by local tanneries to process animal hides for leather.

9. Recycling in nature is especially evident here, where fallen trees are decaying and turning into rich compost to nourish other life. A dense accumulation of living and dead material, however, can also become a fire hazard. In nature, occasional lightning fires would burn this fuel and the forest would benefit. Knowledge of fire ecology is important for resource managers, and prescribed burn programs are an effort to bring the natural processes of a forest back into balance. Air quality, public education, safety and costs must also be considered. Straight ahead beyond this post perhaps you can see where an old growth tree has burned down. It is the next stop on the trail.

10. Portola's Shell Tree, 17 feet in diameter, was approximately 2,000 years old when it burned down in 1990. Current research estimates an average 60-year interval between forest fires in this area. Shell Tree may have survived over 30 fires during its long lifetime, enough fires to burn away its heartwood, leaving only a living shell. As the tree decays it is enriching the nearby soil, and new plants will grow where the tree stood for so long. Notice also that the 1990 fire caused new sprouts to emerge from nearby redwoods.

11. This healthy redwood looks like a giant candle! Its trunk is growing straight out of the ground, without the usual wide base that most redwood trunks have. This is a clue that unusually high floodwaters in Pescadero Creek sometime in the past brought enough new topsoil to cover the base of the tree. You are standing on a floodplain! Underground, new feeder roots have turned upward into this nutritious new food source from upstream.

As you follow the trail be watching for what you have already learned, and be ready for new sights too. Watch for the bay trees, the trees with at least three other common names - pepperwood, laurel, Oregon myrtle, (*Umbellularia californica*). Find the fuzzy-leafed hazel.

Come back often, because at different times of the year there may be mushrooms, or wildflowers, or steelhead trout, all part of the Portola State Park family. Thank you for helping to keep it alive and healthy. Talk with the Portola staff about your new discoveries.

The Sequoia Trail continues upstream above the creek, across the same bridge, and back to Park Headquarters. Enjoy the rest of your visit.

## Be Aware of . . .



Actual size  
WESTERN BLACK-LEGGED TICK



Drawing by C. McLawhorn



Drawing by C. McLawhorn



Drawing by C. McLawhorn

• **TICKS** Ask at the Portola office for the latest information about ticks and first aid for tick bites. Ticks are common in the Santa Cruz Mountains, and there could be Lyme disease-infected ticks at Portola. Report any tick bites to park staff, and learn more about the fascinating life cycle of this surprising animal.

• **YELLOWJACKETS** These insects, living mainly in logs or in the ground, are attracted to meat and sugar; an open soft drink can or a barbecue will attract yellowjackets from long distances. Notify the Portola staff if you have found a place where yellowjackets are flying in and out of a hole in a log or in the ground. But watch them from a long distance: Yellowjackets will defend their nests with repeated painful stings to any perceived invader. Report any stings to park staff. Stings can cause severe allergic reactions.

• **POISON OAK** Learn to identify this California native as it changes throughout the seasons. Leaves in groups of three may be green, red, shiny or dull, or gone in winter! Any parts of the plant can cause an allergic reaction. Stay on hiking trails to reduce your chances of exposure to poison oak. Bear Creek Trail and Coyote Ridge Trail are good places to find it.

• **NETTLES** Look for stinging nettle in moist areas where the ground is loose. Streambanks are ideal places for nettles to grow. Large, spear-shaped opposite leaves grow on a stem which may be up to six feet tall. Tiny, poison-filled hairs can inflict a painful reaction when brushed against.

## Welcome to Portola State Park

Portola is a natural stream basin of mixed evergreen forest, featuring old growth and second-growth redwoods. On sunnier hillsides the redwoods give way to hardwoods and shrubs. The dense understory is mostly huckleberry. Ferns and shade-tolerant plants are found along the creeks. The park also is home for a surprising variety of wildlife. Pescadero, Peters, and Slate creeks flow along fault lines in the earth where oil seepage and marine fossil deposits hint at the complex geologic history of the area.

Portola is interconnected by hiking trails to Pescadero Creek County Park to the west, and Long Ridge Open Space Preserve to the east. Over 10,000 acres provide visitors with over 50 miles of trails, some of which are open to horses and bicycles as well as hikers. Visitors are encouraged to explore this combined area throughout the year.

## Camping and Picnicking

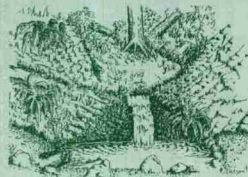
• **Family campsites** - Portola has 52 developed campsites, each with table, food locker, and fire ring. Restrooms with flush toilets and hot showers are nearby. A maximum of eight people and two vehicles are allowed per campsite.

• **Walk-in campsites** - Six small walk-in campsites are available in a separate area. Four people, one tent and two vehicles are allowed per walk-in site.

• **Walk-in Group camping** - Four group campsites are available for campers willing to walk 20-150 yards from the closest parking. Because of limited space, RVs are not permitted in the group camp lots. Point and Circle areas can hold up to 50 campers each, and can be reserved together for groups of up to 100 people. Hillside and Ravine areas can hold up to 50 and 25 persons each, respectively. Reservations can be made for each of these four sites. Reservations are especially rec-

ommended on spring, summer and fall weekends. A contract service handles all State Park reservations.

• **Backpack Camps** - Backpackers must camp at designated sites. Contact Portola directly for reserving a site at Slate Creek Trail Camp, 3 miles east of Portola Headquarters on Slate Creek Trail. Trail campers may also park at Portola and camp overnight at Shaw Flat or Tarwater campgrounds, in Pescadero Creek County Park. Parking fees are charged.



Gene Chesnut sketch

• **Group Day-Use Area** - Portola's group picnic area is large enough for 75 people, with nearby parking for 20 vehicles. Reservations for this day-use area, called "Ramada" are made by calling the park. All other picnic areas are available all year, on a first-come-first-served basis.

• **Nature Programs** - Summer visitors are invited to ask about evening campfire programs, guided nature walks, and other programs. Visitors can also walk the Sequoia Trail, a short self-guided nature walk through a redwood forest. Look for the Sequoia Nature Trail Guide in this brochure.

